

13
8
9
py 1

Studies in Social Work Number 9
January, 1916

PAUPERISM: AN ANALYSIS

A PAPER SUBMITTED IN SECTION VIII, PUBLIC
HEALTH AND MEDICAL SCIENCE, OF THE
SECOND PAN-AMERICAN SCIENTIFIC
CONGRESS: WASHINGTON,
DECEMBER, 1915

BY
EDWARD T. DEVINE

Price: ten cents

The New York School of Philanthropy

UNITED CHARITIES BUILDING

NEW YORK CITY
Collected set.

HV
IS 213

Copyright, 1916, by
The New York School of Philanthropy

Gift
Institution
APR 19 1917

PAUPERISM

Legally, in England and in countries which have followed English usage, pauperism, as distinguished from poverty, consists merely in the habitual receipt of official public relief.

Etymologically, the word is derived from the Latin *pauper*, meaning, as in its modern French and Spanish equivalents [*pauvre*, *pobre*], simply poor, without means of support; but when pushed farther back to its Latin and Greek origins [*paucus*, Gk. *παῦς*; *pario*, Gk. *παρός*] the word signifies not indigence but inefficiency. Making little, rather than needing much, is its original suggestion. The pauper is thus not one who from sudden, unforeseen misfortune is reduced to need, even if that need is to be supplied by public relief, but one who brings forth little or nothing, the incapable; the non-producer.

Economically, pauperism describes the state of the social debtor, the one who is carried as a burden on industry and does not himself take any effective part in the production of wealth.

Biologically, pauperism represents a primitive type, surviving in the struggle for existence only by parasitism, or a pathological type, emerging from abnormal environment.

Sociologically, the pauper is a deviation from the normal, incapable of assimilation through ordinary economic motives and social forces; presenting a dis-

tinct social problem, as do the criminal, the inebriate, the prostitute, the monopolist, and the revolutionist.

Psychologically, pauperism is poverty plus a mental attitude in which are mingled discouragement, lack of ambition and imagination, thriftlessness, irresponsibility, passive resignation to a parasitic relation to society. Vagrancy, the technical offense of living without regular employment when not having other visible means of support, and mendicancy, the soliciting of alms from passers-by, are the more active expressions of pauperism, of which the ordinary, superficial test is simply the necessity for some form of permanent relief because of fault, deficiency, or weakness of character.

Pauperism must be clearly differentiated from poverty—the larger and more important problem—which presents many aspects that may be wholly unfamiliar to those who know only pauperism. Some of those aspects face towards economic reform; others towards health, housing, or the administration of justice.

In recent years there are two clearly distinguishable, often antagonistic views of poverty, one of which we may call, broadly speaking, the economic, and the other the biologic. According to the first view the differences among men are due mainly to their environment, their training and opportunities; according to the other, mainly to their inherent nature, their biologic inheritance, their protoplasm. True, biology concerns itself also with environmental influence, and economics recognizes unalterable differences in human beings; but there is justification for the distinction, if not pressed too far, in that the main preoccupation of economics is with the wants and activities of men in society, with their actual

behavior in view of the rewards obtainable for given efforts; while that of biology is with generation, reproduction, and the development of characteristics derived from ancestors.

Both views are indispensable and they can be reconciled. By economic, sanitary and social reforms, public hygiene and social insurance, effective organization of charity and the development of educational measures, economic poverty can be reduced in amount and the distinct hygienic problem of pauperism can be isolated. This residual problem is largely one of mental defect, calling for segregation and humane treatment of individuals and the gradual elimination of defective strains; but it involves also far-reaching measures which affect pauperism incidentally and are to be advocated chiefly in the interests of those who are in no danger whatever of becoming paupers.

The reconciliation or assimilation of the biologic and the economic view of poverty justifies its consideration in a scientific congress. If we think of pauperism as mental disease or mental defect, and of poverty which is not pauperism as an economic and social condition, the former to be eliminated or relieved by eugenic and sanitary measures acting on the individual, the latter to be eliminated or mitigated by economic progress and social reform, resulting in greater efficiency and more just relations, we are at least thinking in scientific terms, and relying upon remedies which science can examine and assess.

This view of pauperism and poverty is in contrast both with the legal conception which underlies English and North American poor laws and with the religious

conception which has more especially colored the charity of Catholic countries in Central and South America. The English law recognizes a legal right to relief. It creates an elaborate machinery for the administration of this poor relief. The almshouse* is its central feature. A hospital or infirmary, and in recent years a sanatorium for consumptives and other special institutions, supplement the almshouse proper, which is mainly for aged infirm or chronically disabled dependents. Outdoor relief, by which is meant assistance given to the poor in their own homes, is another recognized feature of poor relief in nearly all communities in which the traditions and customs of the English poor law have been established. The fundamental idea of the English poor law is that the state is responsible for the relief of destitution and for the prevention of mendicancy and vagrancy; that whatever is required to maintain life and prevent actual suffering from hunger and exposure is to be done from funds raised by local taxation, except of course in so far as these needs are met by relatives, neighbors, relief societies, churches, trade unions, or other voluntary agencies. When other sources fail, in the last extremity, there is always the public relief official—overseer of the poor, as he is oftenest called—whose duty it is to relieve the distress. This is conceived to be one of the most elementary and imperative obligations of the state, to be discharged through some appropriate governmental agency.

The religious conception of charity, as a means of spiritual edification to the giver, not unfamiliar in

*Also called Poor House, Poor Farm, County Home, etc.; the equivalent of the English Workhouse.

English-speaking countries, but more emphasized and exemplified in Latin America, involves a different conception both of charitable relief and of the destitution which charity is to relieve. Not the right to relief, but the privilege of giving, is its central feature. Not the prevention of begging and of vagrancy, but the prevention of indifference and hardness of heart, is its aim. "Our families," says a writer in the Buenos Aires General Census of 1910, "have been essentially charitable at all times; the poor have never called at their doors in vain. Religious by tradition, inheritance and personal connection, our ancestors were imbued with such definite charitable principles that they never passed a poor person by." "This is the cause," adds the Argentine commentator, "of the existence of the legion of false beggars."

The scientific view of poverty is that it is the result of maladjustments, biologic, economic, and social, but above all psychologic, i. e., the survival of instincts and motives suitable to an earlier and more primitive stage of existence, but out of place in the modern world, and especially in the conditions of life of the western hemisphere in our generation. The scientific view of pauperism is that it is one of the worst, the most extreme of these maladjustments, with no adequate defense or justification from the religious point of view, no adequate provision either for relief or for prevention in any system of poor law yet devised, yielding neither to such coercive measures as have been applied by the state nor to acts done under the charitable impulse, however self-sacrificing or heroic those actions may be.

The bad tradition, inherited equally through church

and state, is that poverty is a part of the natural order of things, to be constantly relieved by charity or by the poor law, but constantly repeated in each generation in order that charity may be kept alive and that the poor law may function. The new view, the natural view, as I venture to suggest, for North and South America, if by natural we mean that which corresponds to the conditions among which we live, is that poverty is not necessary or tolerable, that we may confidently look forward to a time when misery, squalor, a positive lack of the necessities and ordinary decencies and comforts of life, shall be absolutely unknown among us; when a standard of living sufficient for physical and moral well-being shall be possible for every class in society; when education, recreation, and leisure shall be within reach of all; when childhood shall be universally protected, the efficient working life prolonged, disease greatly diminished and its financial burdens distributed through insurance, old age postponed and amply provided for, so that it does not mean economic distress.

For the realization of such an ideal the whole course of events in the western world in modern times has been preparing. The enormous increase of capital, the invention and improvement of machinery, the expansion of the scale of production, the organization of industry, the division of labor, the development of transportation, the widening of markets, the progress of science and of technical education, the increase of efficiency caused by higher standards of living and the conquest of disease, especially of the tropical diseases, the perfection of administrative as well as of technical processes—an amazing series of revolutionary changes familiar

to the whole world, but of greatest significance when they are brought to bear upon the undeveloped, the all but untouched, natural resources of our still sparsely populated continents of the west—make possible here a civilization without poverty, a manner of life in which self-respecting economic independence shall be as much a matter of course as political and civil liberty.

This contrast between the old world and the new, between Europe and the Americas, was obvious before the devastating European war. It will be unhappily more obvious still in the years which immediately follow the destruction of resources for which the war is responsible. In that destruction all the world suffers, but in the nature of things the countries at war suffer most, and even the highest technical efficiency is no substitute for the capital, the productive energy, and the raw materials which the war destroys.

Our productive capacity, if it can be devoted to peaceful ends, our economic resources, if they can be applied to the legitimate wants of man, are ample for a civilization without poverty. We have only to apply the knowledge we already have, to take the trouble and meet the expense, in order to abolish poverty in the sense that means actual deprivation of the conditions essential to a rational, prosperous, and enlightened existence for all those who on their part meet its essential individual conditions. The comprehensive means to this end lie beyond the scope of this paper. The prevention of pauperism is a part—a very specific and exceptional part—of this larger task. The first and most strategic point of attack is in the treatment of the mentally defective.

The report of the English Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-minded in 1908 sets forth conservatively and authoritatively the conclusions on which we may base a sound public policy:

- (1) That both on grounds of fact and of theory there is the highest degree of probability that feeble-mindedness is usually spontaneous in origin—that is, not due to influences acting on the parent—and tends strongly to be inherited;
- (2) That, especially in view of the evidence concerning fertility, the prevention of mentally defective persons from becoming parents would tend largely to diminish the number of such persons in the population;
- (3) That the evidence for these conclusions strongly supports measures, which on other grounds are of pressing importance, for placing mentally defective persons, men and women, who are living at large and uncontrolled, in institutions where they will be employed and detained; and in this, and in many other ways, kept under effectual supervision as long as may be necessary.

Dr. Martin W. Barr, of Pennsylvania, writing in *Charities* four years earlier, referred to the modern institutional care of the feeble-minded as the utilization of a waste product, a forcible illustration of one of the greatest culminations of the nineteenth century. The recognition of the possibilities and limitations of the mentally defective leads to the creation of a sphere for him in which, trained and encouraged in congenial occupations, he may attain to a certain degree of independence, and cease to be either a menace to society or a helpless burden.

It is not merely because of their biologic character that the mentally defective are unfit for parenthood. They are unfit guardians for children, being unable to give them moral or economic training. Their income, if earned through wages, is irregular and insufficient to support a stable home life. Poverty, intemperance, immorality, and neglect, even of the elementary physical needs of children, are the natural, almost the inevitable, characteristics of their homes. Unfit to maintain domestic life, the mentally subnormal are equally ill adapted to industrial life as organized in a régime of free competition. They cannot earn minimum wages and they clog the wheels even of the best organized and most enlightened industries. They need occupation, but under special supervision and protection. Their tasks should be carefully selected and suited to their capacities, but need not, as is sometimes hastily inferred, be the dirtiest and most disagreeable. The recognition of the principle of guardianship from infancy; the segregation of retarded and backward children in the schools, in order that they may be studied individually, their physical defects discovered and remedied, and those who are definitely feeble-minded early identified and removed to appropriate institutions and colonies, except of course in those cases in which without undue expense or difficulty efficient care can be given at home; the removal of the feeble-minded from prisons and reformatories to these special institutions, legal punishment and reformation being obviously wholly inapplicable to them; and the creation in each state of a central authority—chiefly medical—comparable to our commissions of lunacy, to have the oversight of all mentally

defective, are the main features of a progressive policy for dealing with the chief cause of pauperism.

Probably not more than fifteen per cent of the demonstrably feeble-minded in the United States are as yet segregated in special colonies or institutions suitable for their care. It is estimated that eighty-five per cent of the insane are treated in hospitals constructed and maintained especially for them. If it were necessary to choose it is a question whether it would not be preferable to reverse these proportions, leaving the insane at large, in spite of their disease, and segregating the mentally defective whose minds cannot be cured but who can transmit their defect, with its train of pauperism, prostitution, criminality, and other grievous consequences.

Alcoholism, although a recognized complication in mental instability and defect, deserves also separate consideration. It has been attacked as a vice, as a crime, as a habit, as a weakness, as a disease. It is all of these things, but here we are interested in it chiefly as a disease, furnishing a problem for mental hygiene and resulting in pauperism. The international list of causes of death recognizes alcoholism, acute and chronic, and from this specific disease as distinct from all organic diseases attributed to alcoholism, the United States census reports 3744 deaths in the registration area in 1913, approximately one in 240 of all deaths —a number larger than the combined number of deaths from malaria, pellagra, rickets, lead poisoning, small-pox, anthrax, and rabies. Its importance however is of course but faintly indicated in mortality tables. As an obstacle to economic independence, as a cause of

that unreliability and inefficiency which result in pauperism, it is probably surpassed only by inherited mental defect. In many parts of the world there has been organized a campaign against the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages, on the theory that the best way to affect the mind of the inebriate, present and prospective, is to withhold absolutely the means of feeding the appetite. This is a drastic, but certainly not an illogical, method. Just as we seek to exterminate the tuberculosis bacillus by spitting ordinances, and the malaria germ by warfare on the mosquito, both of which represent attacks on the external or exciting cause of the infection, rather than attempts to build up resisting power, so by removing completely the exciting external cause of alcoholism we may hope to stamp out that disease. There are some dissenting or at least doubting voices in each case. Perhaps immunity or tolerance of an infection may be lost if for a generation or two the disease is kept at a distance through purely mechanical devices. So a prohibition era may be followed by greater destruction if alcohol comes back into use. The analogy seems to be warranted. Unless we are afraid of humanity's loss of immunity from the conquest of tuberculosis, we need not fear the loss of immunity from the conquest of strong drink. Nevertheless prohibition relies upon a material and coercive method, and if it should prove to be possible within a reasonable time to exterminate alcoholism on a spiritual basis, through genuine temperance (which certainly for all those in danger of alcoholism means abstinence) there are those who will prefer it and think no price too high to pay for such a

conquest. A wise procedure would be to found local and national associations for the prevention of alcoholism, similar to those already enlisted in the world crusade against tuberculosis. The medical profession, recognizing the weaknesses of some of its own members, but recognizing also its peculiar responsibility in all such hygienic campaigns, would naturally take the initiative, preventing rash mistakes and giving its unique support to sound measures. Alcoholism as a physical disease, as a mental affliction, would thus be subjected to the same painstaking scientific study, the same many-sided attack, that medical authorities and laymen have given coöperatively to tuberculosis and hook-worm, and are now beginning to give to venereal disease and to infant mortality. Out of such study and the sane experiments to which it would lead would come a program of social action, of mental and physical hygiene, directed towards the elimination of alcoholism.

The drug habit and sexual immorality and excesses of all kinds contribute to the problem of pauperism. Certain diseases like malaria and pellagra and the hook-worm disease, which especially affect the spirit, undermining energy, reducing efficiency, lowering the standard of living, would likewise demand consideration in any complete discussion of pauperism. Indeed, sickness of any kind in wage-earners' families, unless its expense is amply covered by insurance, may lead to just that kind of discouragement and hopelessness of which the pauper spirit is bred.

Even if the native stock is not degenerate and the original capacity entirely normal, the educational system may be so inefficient and so ill adapted to existing

conditions as to produce in effect a generation of paupers. Neither general nor technical education can make efficient workers from the mentally defective; but an inefficient and badly organized educational system can create a semblance of relative feebleness of mind and economic incapacity in what was originally the healthiest and most vigorous stock.

Industrial exploitation is a contributing cause of pauperism, whether it take the form of excessively low wages, or a long working day, or a seven-day week, or the speeding process with its exhausting fatigue. So also are irregularity and uncertainty of employment, such as result even in periods of comparative prosperity from the custom of keeping about any industrial establishment, on the bait of occasional casual labor, a larger number of laborers than is normally required to do the work of the industry.

Revolutionary changes in industrial processes, throwing out of employment those who cannot readily adapt themselves to the new methods, are responsible for much of that pauperism which may be called a by-product of industry. Beneficial they may be to society, and at the same time disastrous to those individuals who cannot quickly adapt themselves to the new demands.

Any economic institution which discourages thrift and self-dependence, such as slavery or peonage, develops a mental attitude which may remain to the third and fourth generation, after the system itself has been abolished. Oppressive forms of taxation and of land tenure have similar effects. Class legislation and uneven administration of justice in the courts, when

long enough continued and when there is no adequate means of resistance or reform, may produce a pauper proletariat.

Militarism, a feudal organization of society, and other rigid caste systems, however efficient they may appear externally, contain the germs of pauperism for the subordinate classes, though these germs may first develop their baneful influences only after democracy has replaced the social order in which they were planted. Probably the pauperism of backward communities in northern sections of the United States might be traced through genealogical studies to imported convicts of the colonial era, to inferior Irish immigration of the middle of the century, and to assisted criminal and pauper immigration from the continent of Europe in more recent years. Probably much of the criminality and inefficiency of large classes of southern Negroes is in effect high grade feeble-mindedness, which did not seriously interfere with the productivity of directed slave labor, but is revealed under the conditions of free competition. We may expect that natural eugenic influences, arising in the one case from more stable marriage and family institutions among the descendants of the slave population, and in the other from the freer mingling of urban, semi-urban, and rural populations made possible by modern methods of communication, will tend to eliminate these kinds of pauperism together with the mental inferiority to which it is due.

Mental hygiene has its tasks with those who have the pauper spirit and with those who are in danger of acquiring it; but it has its tasks also with charitable givers, with public relief officials and with the citizens whose

ideals the public relief policy of the state represents. Both official public relief and voluntary religious charity have been at bottom consciously or unconsciously pessimistic. They have assumed the continuance, if not the desirability, of a permanent class of dependent poor. The harsh, unsympathetic attitude of almshouse keepers, and the sentimental, spiritually selfish attitude of volunteer dole-givers, are both out of harmony with the pragmatic, humane view which challenges the very existence of pauperism, which hopes to put an end to the need for official poor relief and for voluntary charity alike. Organized charity is the embodiment in practice of this new view. It discountenances indiscriminate almsgiving and every other custom, however sanctified by tradition and sentiment, which encourages the pauper spirit. It demands accurate knowledge of the individual circumstances in each case of need as a basis for a plan of relief. It advocates inquiry and careful records and intelligent coöperation. It ministers to the strength and not to the weakness of those who are in trouble. It emphasizes family solidarity and family responsibility. It believes that the best occupation for a sick person is to get well, that an able-bodied married man should support his family, that mothers of young children should nurse and nurture their offspring, that all who are earning to their full capacity should save something for future emergencies, and that those who are in need of charitable assistance should receive aid which in kind and in amount is determined not by the accident as to whether a benevolent individual passes their way, or a relief agency is or is not in funds, or an institution has or has not been established to provide

for that need, but is determined, on the contrary, by a painstaking and discriminating study of the present situation and the previous experience of the individual or the family in question. It insists that diagnosis rather than charitable impulse should be the basis of every decision, though charitable impulses, thus guided and directed to wise action, are by all means to be encouraged and strengthened.

Doing different things for different persons, as organized charity demands, if they are to be in any high degree the right things, involves the training of professional social workers for relief societies, for the social service of hospitals and dispensaries, for the probation and parole work of courts, and for many other kinds of work in which a technique and special literature already exist. Such trained workers do not replace volunteers, but increase their number and their efficiency. We might well hope that this discussion would give an impetus to the establishment in one or more of the capitals of South America of a School of Philanthropy for the training of social workers in all the gathered wisdom of the church, enriched and supplemented by the social sciences and their practical applications in all countries.

We come then to the conclusion—

That every rational economic reform, every step in the humanizing of industry, every means of preventing disease and of relieving the people of its financial burdens, every substitution of a reasonable adjustment for a social or economic maladjustment, will have a beneficial result in drying up the sources of pauperism;

That the frontal attack upon pauperism lies in the

segregation and humane care of the feeble-minded, the prevention of alcoholism, and the development of social insurance against sickness;

That to these ends the professional and technical training of sanitarians for the public health service, and the professional and technical training of social workers for the tasks of relief and prevention, are of paramount importance.



0 027 273 541 4

OTHER NUMBERS IN THIS SERIES

1. Social Work with Families and Individuals: A brief manual for investigators. By PORTER R. LEE. 16 pp. Five cents.
2. Organized Charity and Industry. A chapter from the history of the New York Charity Organization Society. By EDWARD T. DEVINE. 16 pp. Five cents.
3. The Probation Officer at Work. By HENRY W. THURSTON. 24 pp. Five cents.
4. Is Social Work a Profession? By ABRAHAM FLEXNER. 24 pp. Five cents.
5. Facts about Wage Earners: 17 diagrams and statistical tables. By MARY VAN KLEECK. 40 pp. Twenty-five cents.
6. Section on Charity from the Shulhan Arukh. Translated by LOUIS FEINBERG. 32 pp. Twenty-five cents.
7. Facts about the Death-Rate: 27 diagrams and descriptive text. By LILIAN BRANDT. 48 pp. Twenty-five cents.
8. Facts about Tuberculosis: 20 diagrams with brief descriptive text. By LILIAN BRANDT. 40 pp. Twenty-five cents.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 027 273 541 4

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 027 273 541 4